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RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 2364
RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL 0263
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PORT AU PRINCE 000237

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ASEC](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: EVOLVING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT IN CITE SOLEIL

REF: A. 07 PORT AU PRINCE 1688
[1](#)B. 07 PORT AU PRINCE 0523

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Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson. Reason: E.O. 12958 1.4
(b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Embassy has witnessed increasing presence of apparent gang youth in Cite Soleil that could pose a security threat to Embassy activities in that area, including HSI, as well as undermine the security improvements resulting from MINUSTAH's intervention in late 2006-early 2007. Embassy has raised this issue with GOH officials, urging them to increase Haitian National Police presence in Cite Soleil as well as availability of community services and encouraged MINUSTAH to adjust patrols in Cite Soleil. The evolving security environment underscores the need to vigorously continue our efforts, with an appropriate security posture reflecting recent developments, to assist residents of Cite Soleil while pressing the GOH and Haiti's private sector to move much more quickly to establish a visible, positive presence. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Cite Soleil municipality just outside Port au Prince was the focus of a strong MINUSTAH military effort in late 2006-early 2007 to clear out gangs and arrest gang leaders. From late in the Aristide period until the MINUSTAH intervention, gangs were such a threat that GOH entities feared to enter the area let alone maintain a presence there. The security situation in Cite Soleil has improved dramatically since that MINUSTAH action, during which more than 700 gang members were arrested. However, at least four factors account for the continuing fragility of security in Cite Soleil: 1) although most (but not all) gang leaders have been rounded up, gangs still exist, and some imprisoned gang leaders remain in contact with their members; furthermore, gang members have adapted their tactics to MINUSTAH's less aggressive posture; 2) a large number of arms remain hidden in the area; 3) having secured the area by early 2007, MINUSTAH forces have ceased aggressive tactics and have gradually turned over police responsibilities to the Haitian National Police (HNP); and 4) the presence of the HNP in Cite Soleil remains very limited.

13. (C) During Embassy officers' visits to Cite Soleil accompanied by RSO staff (but not by MINUSTAH or HNP anti-riot police) in January-early February, ARSOs encountered unarmed youths mimicking gang dress and street behavior loitering in the immediate vicinity of sites being visited. This continues an upward trend in gang visibility first observed last October (Ref A). MINUSTAH officials report similar observations during their visits to the area. Embassy visits to Cite Soleil during most of 2007 encountered no such intimidating presence. However, USAID Amcit implementing partners working in Cite Soleil note presence of such youths since the inception of their programs, telling us that they have been menaced and hit up for jobs or a percentage of the project's funding. While they have not been physically threatened, the posturing and attempts at extortion are intimidating, occasionally causing our implementers to suspend projects and leave the area for brief periods. HNP Commissar for Cite Soleil Rosemond Aristide reported to RSO and NAS February 7 that HNP has had reports of incidents of intimidation and night-time strong-armed robberies, and that kidnappers are again using Cite Soleil safe-houses to hold kidnapping victims.

14. (C) We are unable to determine definitively if these youths are members of long-standing gangs who now feel they can act with impunity, or whether these are previously unaffiliated youths attempting to mimic gang behavior. HNP Director Mario Andresol told RSO some gangs - whether in Cite Soleil or in parts of Port au Prince - are being reconstituted by former gang members and by recently cashiered HNP officers. There has been no reported uptick in Cite Soleil crime statistics -- although since December there has been a rise in kidnappings elsewhere in the Port au Prince metropolitan area that may have been carried out by criminal or gang elements from Cite Soleil. Nevertheless,

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this street presence meant to intimidate is a factor of security concern. The HNP has yet to establish a significant presence in Cite Soleil and Rosemund only has access to a small number of trained police officers, approximately 32. While MINUSTAH patrols in Cite Soleil continue, MINUSTAH has reduced the visibility of its presence there somewhat as it shifts its main focus to border security to carry out its expanded mandate. It appears that gangs or gang-mimicking youths are probing MINUSTAH and HNP to learn how far they can push before eliciting a response.

15. (C) The GOH has attempted to reintegrate former gang members into society and decommission their weapons with little success thus far. That effort is led by a GOH body, the National Commission on Disarmament, Dismantlement, and Reintegration (CNDDR), headed by Alix Fils-Aime. Embassy assessment, backed up by RSO sources in MINUSTAH, is that weapons decommissioning has had zero effect on supply of weapons. At most several score of weapons, the great majority of them worn out and barely usable, have been turned over to CNDDR. CNDDR attempts to rehabilitate gang members through training and work projects have produced little in the way of employment. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many "graduates" of the program are back on the street with a sense of entitlement and impunity.

16. (C) HNP and other Embassy sources indicate that this public presence of young street toughs has made local residents nervous but not yet disrupted normal life in Cite Soleil restored by MINUSTAH a year ago. HSI noted that neither has this presence intimidated the network of Cite Soleil community leaders, many supported by HSI small projects, who continue to actively assert themselves against gangs in the interest of neighborhood security and stability. A gang attack on those leaders, however, in the absence of an effective police presence, would likely result in a collapse of community leader cooperation with HSI.

17. (C) The GOH has now taken up the issue. In conversation with Ambassador February 8, Prime Minister Alexis said that his government is concerned by reports of increased insecurity in Cite Soleil, observing that it would be a "major step backward." Furthermore, he sought assurances that the USG would maintain its activities in Cite Soleil, though USAID and HSI, claiming that the GOH had few resources at hand to improve the lives of its citizens. The PM added that President Preval is seized with the issue and had convoked a National Security Meeting (involving the PM's office, State Secretary for Public Security, and HNP, as well as Interior) for the next day. Ambassador stressed need for more visible HNP presence; Alexis demanded that we quickly begin construction of the police stations in the area as planned in HSI. He reiterated his commitment that the HNP would be ready to move in with sufficient numbers as soon as we can get the buildings complete.

18. (C) UNSRSG Annabi told Ambassador that he and his colleagues have discussed the Cite Soleil security issue both internally, and with the Prime Minister Alexis. At the PM's request, MINUSTAH has begun redeploying forces in Cite Soleil to demonstrate a more robust presence, increasing numbers on the ground and frequency of patrols. The SRSG shares our concern that the GOH's limited engagement thus far on the ground, whether in terms of police or services, has given the remnants of gangs (and the wannabes) an opening "that must be closed." He also raised the issue of police stations, while agreeing that the HNP must bring more police into the area.

19. (C) Comment. The evolving security environment underscores the need to vigorously continue our efforts to assist residents of Cite Soleil while pressing hard the GOH and Haiti's private sector to move quickly to establish a visible, positive presence in the area. After a year of relative calm, Haitians need to see that their government takes seriously a potential resurgence of gang violence in the slum area and that the GOH is committed to reintegrating the marginal neighborhood back into the fold. For our part,

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taking into account the need to adjust our security posture appropriately as circumstances warrant, Embassy will work to implement priority stabilization projects including the construction of police stations. The bottom line: deterioration of security in Cite Soleil bodes ill for the stabilization of that critical neighborhood, with implications for Haiti's security nation-wide.

SANDERSON